

THE  
TANTRASAMUCCYA  
OF  
NARĀYAṆA

WITH THE COMMENTARY VIMARŚINĪ  
OF  
ŚAṆKARA

*Edited By*

MAHĀMAHOPĀDHYĀYA T. GAṆAPATI ŚĀSTRĪ  
WITH AN ELABORATE INTRODUCTION

*By*

**DR. N. P. UNNI**

Professor & Head of the Sanskrit, University of Kerala

[Two Parts Bound in one]



**NAG PUBLISHERS**

11A/U.A. JAWAHAR NAGAR  
DELHI-7

# Tantrasamuccaya

## A GENERAL INTRODUCTION

*Dr. N. P. Unni*

### *Early Works on Tantra*

Tantras, Āgamas and Samhitās constitute a major branch of religious literature in Sanskrit. According to one account there are more than two hundred works of different size and variety pertaining to this interesting field of study. The general features of this class of literature can be specified under four heads, viz., Jñāna or knowledge and its nature ; Yoga or the concentration of mind and the various means of attaining the same ; Kriyā or construction of temples and the consecration of idols in temples for worship and Caryā the religious rites, social institutions and observances.

Of the four divisions, emphasis is often laid on one or two branches according to the predilection of the people of various regions as in the case of Kerala where the divisions of Kriyā and Caryā assume significance. Strictly speaking the line of demarcation between the divisions is negligible.

The term Tantra is generally applied to a class of religious literature. To be specific the term Tantra stands for a system of doctrines, or a book. Āgama means tradition and Samhitā signifies a collection of sacred texts. The distinction consists only in minor details. Accordingly, Āgamas may be considered as a special class of works which propagate the worship of Śiva and Śakti. Works of a similar kind specially devoted to the sect of Viṣṇu are termed Samhitās. Tantras derive materials from both these classes of literature. The Vaiṣṇavas consider Samhitās as their sacred texts. It is the Śaivas who propagate the Āgamas and hence they are often popularly called Śaivāgamas. In

its strict sense only the Śāktas practice the Tantras which is more ritualistic in nature.

The word Tantra is derived from the root 'Tanu' meaning 'to expand'. Some hold the view that the word has some connotation for the physical aspect of the human being. Others relate the word to 'tantri'—the string of a lute because of the musical qualities of the principles. The Viṣṇusambhitā has given an etymology of the term as follows :—

सर्वेष्ट्या येन तन्मन्त्रे त्रायन्ते च भवाञ्जनः ।

इति तन्त्रस्य तन्त्रत्वं तन्त्रज्ञाः परिचक्षते ॥

Among the religious texts the Tantras occupy only the fourth position after Śruti, Smṛti and Purāṇa, though preceptors of Tantra give them a place second only to the Vedas. Monier Williams considers Tantra as a "class of works teaching magical and mystical formulæ (mostly in the form of dialogues between Śiva and Durgā and said to treat of five subjects ; the creation, the destruction of the world, the worship of the Gods, the attainment of all objects, especially of six superhuman faculties and the four modes of union with the Supreme spirit by meditation. The author of the Sanskrit lexical work Śabdārthacintāmaṇi has quoted a definition of Tantra which gives a better idea of the class of work as follows :

सर्गश्च प्रतिसर्गश्च मन्त्रलक्षणमेव च ।

देवतानां च संस्थानं तीर्थानां चैव वर्णनम् ॥

तथैवाश्रमघर्मश्च मन्त्रसंस्थानमेव च ।

संस्थानं चैव भूतानां यन्त्राणां चैव निर्णयः ॥

उत्पत्तिविवृत्तानां च तरुणां कल्पसंज्ञितम् ।

संस्थानं ज्योतिषां चैव पुराणाख्यानमेव च ॥

कोषस्य कथनं चैव भूतानां परिभाषणम् ।

शैवाशैवस्य वाख्यानं तरुकाणां च वर्णनम् ॥

तद्वत्कस्य वाख्यानं स्त्रीपुंसोश्चैव लक्षणम् ।

तद्वत्कस्य वाख्यानं स्त्रीपुंसोश्चैव लक्षणम् ॥

व्यवहारः कथ्यते च तथा चाऽशास्त्रवर्णनम् ।  
इत्यादिलक्षणैर्बुद्धं तन्त्रमित्यभिधीयते ॥

This definition gives an encyclopaedic scope to the class of works. Many of the characteristics of Dharmasāstras are seen in this type of works.

There is a threefold division of Tantras like Viṣṇu-krāntā, Rāhākrāntā and Aśvākrāntā, each of the three divisions having 64 works respectively, making a total of 192 works. Some treatises provide a list of these works. There are other classifications as (i) Samhitā, Āgama and Rahasya (ii) Sāttvika, Rājasa and Tāmasa (iii) Vaidika and Avaidika. Works in the field are classified under these heads based on characteristics. There are other branches of Tantra called Yāmala and Dāmara. Yāmalas which are eight in number contain the features described in the following definition.

सृष्टिश्च ज्योतिर्वाहयानं नित्यकृत्यप्रदीपनम् ।  
कमसूत्रं वर्णभेदो जातिभेदस्तथैव च ॥  
युगचमनश्च संख्यातो यामलस्याष्टलक्षणम् ।

The eight Yāmalas pertain respectively to Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra, Lakṣmī, Umā, Skanda, Gaṇeśa and Graha. The six Dāmaras relate to Yoga, Śiva, Sarasvatī, Brahmā and Gāndharva.

The Āgamas are the religious texts of the Śaiva system and they are spoken of as the utterances from the mouth of Śiva in response to the enquiries of his divine consort Pārvatī. Pādmasamhitā contains a definition of the class of literature keeping in view the above Śiva-Pārvatī concept. The following is the definition :

आगतं पञ्चवक्त्रात् गतं च गिरिजानने ।  
अथ च आमुखेभ्यः तस्मादागममुच्यते ॥  
अथ च अजयप्रदं देवतानां त्रयसंनमः ।  
अथ च त्रयो सर्वेषां उरुचरुणमेव ॥



षट्कर्मसाधनं चैव ध्यानयोगश्चतुर्विधः ।  
सप्तभिर्नैसर्गैर्गुणैस्तं त्वागमं तद् विदुर्बुधाः ॥

The Ṣaṭkarmas referred to here are Śānti, Vāśikarāṇa, Stambhana, Vidyesaṇa Uccāṭana and Māraṇa. These characteristics are commonly applicable to all the Tantras.

Vācaspati Miśra in his commentary on Yogabhāṣya has attempted to derive the word Āgama as follows :

आगच्छन्ति ब्रुविमादोहन्ति अमुदयतिः श्रेयसोपाया यस्मात् स आगमः ।

As already noted those narrated by Śiva to Pārvaṭi are called Āgamas; but those narrated by Pārvaṭi to Śiva are called Nigamas. There are numerous texts on both these categories belonging to a subsidiary nature to deserve the names of Upāgamas and Upanigamas. There are 28 Śaivāgamas which form the base of the religio-philosophical system of the Śaivites. These are enumerated in most of the texts of the system. Then there are works pertaining to the Śākta cult. Accordingly there are five Śubbhāgamas, 64 Kaulāgamas, and 8 Miśrāgamas, forming a total of 77 treatises.

The Samhitās form a distinct class in that they exhibit a wider scope having twelve thousand stanzas for each text. As already noted these pertain to the Vaiṣṇava sect. The Pauṣkarasamhitā has given the following description for this variety.

विष्णुसहस्रनामं संहितायाम् सदागमम् ।  
ये ज्ञान्ये वाक्तरावा वै नास्त्वार्थनायिका शतैः ॥  
सर्वेषां संहितासंज्ञा बोद्धव्या कथनोद्भव ॥

There are numerous texts belonging to this category out of which only a few like Ahirbhūṭhavasamhitā, Līvarasamhitā, Parāśarasamhitā and others are available in print. Dr. Schrader in his introduction to the Pañcāṅga has provided

a list of 215 works of the kind and has admitted that the list is incomplete. Many valuable works mentioned in his list remain to be published.

In addition to works belonging to Tantras, Āgamas and Samhitās there are several compositions in the form of Sūtras. These Tāntrikasūtras belong to several texts. Thus texts like Vaikhānasasūtra and Nārada bhaktisūtra pertain to the Vaiṣṇava sect while Pāsupatasūtra and Bhūtisaṁsāna belong to Śaiva sect. Treatises like Paraśurāmakalpasūtra and Śaktisūtra are the sūtras of the Śākta cult.

A survey of the works of this class will reveal the vast scope and growth of this religio-philosophical literature. Practices of different kind, both pious and obnoxious can be found mentioned in them in addition to magical and mystical formulas.

#### *Kerala Temple and Tāntrika Rituals :*

Though it is difficult to ascertain the period of the introduction of Tantra in Kerala, it can be definitely stated that Tāntrika rituals are closely connected with the temples of Kerala. According to tradition, sage Paraśurāma regained the land of Kerala from the sea throwing his battle axe. He is further credited with the establishment of 108 temples in this region. He is supposed to have brought Brahmins from other parts of India and engaged them to perform rituals in these shrines. The Keralamāhātmya purported to be a legendary history of Kerala maintains that God Viṣṇu instructed Paraśurāma to establish numerous temples all over the region and to install different deities in them. Temples of Durgā were located on sea-shores while those of Śāstā were established in hilly regions. According to the Keralotpatti, the sage is credited with the establishment of 4448 temples out of which 108 belonged to Goddess Durgā.

Another version of the Keralamāhātmya in Sanskrit containing more than 2300 stanzas and a hundred chapters

states that Viṣṇu asked sage Paraśurāma to establish 24000 shrines in which 33 deities are to be installed. The sage did accordingly and made arrangements for the worship engaging twelve Tantrins of great repute. The following stanzas are interesting in this connection.

इत्युक्त्वा विरते शम्भो भगवान् विष्णुरश्वतोत् ।  
एतद् भूमी तु भूपत्वं तवास्तु मम शासनात् ॥  
चतुर्विंशसहस्राणि क्षेत्राणि कुरु भार्गव ।  
त्रयस्त्रिंशदिव देवैश्च ब्रह्मणा शङ्करेण च ॥  
साकं समेत्य त्वदभूमौ वसाम्यहमरिन्दम् ।

ब्राह्मणैर्वेदविदभिश्च धर्मिष्ठैस्तत्त्रयारगैः ।  
पूजां प्रत्यहमस्माकं कारय त्वं भूगुत्तम ॥

उत्तरादीन् द्विजानत्र गोदावर्युपसेवितान् ।  
कल्पयामास देवानां पूजायं भूगुत्तमः ॥  
तन्त्रिणो द्वादश श्रेष्ठान् प्रतिष्ठाप्यैककल्पयत् ।  
चतुर्विंशसहस्रं च देवालयमकल्पयत् ॥

Thus it may be seen that sage Paraśurāma is credited with the establishment of numerous temples throughout the length and breadth of Kerala.

In consonance with the number of temples there are a host of different deities found installed in the shrines of the region. Most popular among the deities are Śiva, Viṣṇu, Bhadrakālī, Durgā, Gaṇapati, Subrahmaṇya, Sarasvatī, Śāstā, Śaṅkaranārāyaṇa, Śrīrāma, Kṛṣṇa, Narasimha, and Pārvatī. Other deities include Lakṣmaṇa, Baladeva, Varāha, Hanumān, Dhyanvantari, Suryanārāyaṇa, Paraśurāma, Kubera and Vedavyāsa. Some of these deities are conceived as having different aspects. For instance, Śiva is conceived as having the aspects of Dakṣiṇāmūrti, Śaṅkaranārāyaṇa, Arḍhanārīśvara, Kīrātarudra, Somaskanda, Candraśekhara, Viṣṇurūḍha, Gaṅgādhara, Tripurāntaka, Mṛtyuñjaya, Kālāntaka, Aghora and other forms numbering over fifty. This is the case with the deities like Viṣṇu and



Devi, both of whom are conceived in their numerous divergent aspects.

Among these deities Śāstā also called Hariharaputra, in view of the conception of the origin of this God as a result of the union between Hari in the form of Mohini and Hara (Śiva). According to tradition Paraśurāma built a chain of temples along the Ghats dedicated Śāstā to stand guard and protect the country. However this may be, there is the fact that most of the important Śāstā temples are located near the summits of the mountains in the east, the one at Śabarimala being the foremost among them. Treatises on Kerala Tantra prescribe detailed rituals for the worship of this God. Similarly Śaṅkara-nārāyaṇa conceived as half Śiva and half Viṣṇu is worshipped in many temples of the region. Another deity peculiarly known to Kerala is Kirātamūrti or the hunter God born out of the union between Śiva and Pārvatī when both assumed the form of hunters. Goddess Rurujit worshipped in several śrīrines is only another aspect of Cāmūṇḍī as the destroyer of the demon Ruru. Over and above these deities, the lords of the quarters, Asvins, the seven sages, Apsarās, Nāgas, Navagrahas and other minor divinities are also worshipped in various centres with rituals befitting them.

The Brahmin priest who is enjoined with traditional rites for installation of idols, conduct of special rituals, festivals and other rites is called Tāntrin. The most famous Tāntrin in the land is the member of the Taraṇanallūr family who has these rights in almost all temples of Kerala. Sage Paraśurāma is supposed to have given this authority to the family of Taraṇanallūr the members of which enjoy these rights down the centuries till date. The Keralamāhātmya has dealt with this aspect. According to it a Brahmin was brought from Kāñcīpuram. Since the river Kāveri was in spate, the Brahmin resorted to his super-human powers to cross over and hence he got the name 'Tarāṇa' meaning one



who has crossed over. The story goes that Paraśurāma called the Brahmin from the other side of the river and asked him to cross over the river which was flooded. The Brahmin, a devotee of Viṣṇu, meditated upon the Lord of fire and threw some sticks over the flood to form a bridge and easily crossed over to the astonishment of the sage. Before this the sage had already brought six Brahmins from Kumbhakonam after ascertaining their proficiency in Mantraśāstra.

Almost every major temple in Kerala has a high priest called Tantri who enjoys the hereditary authority on matters of ritual in the temple. There are several families having these rights and Tarananallūr is the foremost among them. Since a family of Tantrins enjoys rights over several temples it is difficult to attend each temple and hence a Tantrin delegates his powers to other trained Brahmins who are to perform the function of the chief priest. These delegates are called Nampis whose right is fixed for a specific period. While the members of the family of Tantrins attend to the rituals on special occasions like festivals, the Nampis perform the daily routines. Even though other assistants are provided only the Nampi should perform the rituals called Pūjā.

It may be noted that in the Tamilnadu region a set of eligible persons are enjoined to perform rituals in temples. Several priests are present in the temple at the same time and any one of them is free to perform the Pūjā as required by the devotee. Sometimes even the devotee is permitted to offer Pūjā to his liking. Further there the priest utters the Mantras aloud so that all could hear it. But Kerala priests just mutter the Mantras inaudibly and show various gestures with meticulous care following the prescriptions of the manuals. In other words, while the Pūjā is just cursory in other regions, in Kerala only a trained priest can perform it. Further, he alone could touch the idol in the

## Introduction

sanctum sanctorum. On the other hand if anybody else touches the idol it calls for various expiatory ceremonies as if it is polluted. There are two kinds of idols in major temples of Kerala, viz., Acala—that which cannot be moved and Cala that which could be taken out. The first is fixed on the pedestal permanently and it is usually made of granite or sometimes made of a special kind of mortar called Kaṣṣarkarāyoga over which water could not be poured. The movable idols are made of metals. The one used on the occasion of Śrībali, the one on which Abhiṣeka is performed and sandal paste applied and the one taken out for processions inside the shrine are movable idols. The Acala idols are made as standing on the pedestal, sitting on the Piṭha and as reposing as in bed. In certain temples Tāntrika diagrams like Śrīcakra etc., are conceived as deities for worship. Sometimes mere weapons of deities like Śūla (trident), and Khadga (sword) are placed as idols for performing Pūjā.

"The ritual of ceremonial worship is a combination of both Vaidika with Vedic mantras and methods and Tāntrika with non-Vedic mantras and rules, the Tāntrika element slightly predominating over the Vaidika. It, therefore, comes under the category Tāntrika—Vaidika following the classification of the *Puruṣārthaprabodha* of Brahmananda-bhārati. It is Vaidika worship in the Tāntrika mode. The *Pañcatattva* or the *Pañcamakāra*, which constitute an integral part of orthodox Śākta Tantra has, however, no place even in the Devī temples of Kerala. Madya, Māmsa, Matsya and Maithuna, whatever may be their denotation and significance are as such entirely absent in the routine temple ritual. Mudrā alone is there, but it is in the sense of gesture, and there is quite a lot of this."<sup>1</sup>

Rituals in the Kerala temples can be classified under

1. S. Venkitasubramania Iyer, *Religion, Art and Culture*, Trivandrum, 1977, p. 19.

four categories. They are the daily rituals, the monthly rituals, the annual rituals and festivals which take place once or twice in an year. The routine rituals that take place everyday come under the first division. But the modes of worship differ according to the size and popularity of temples which are classified as minor and major. The rituals performed on certain specific days like Tuesday and Friday and those conducted on the asterisms of Kārtika and Śrāvaṇa, and on tithis like Caturthī, Ṣaṣṭhī and Purnamā on a monthly basis form the second category. The annual rituals are those performed annually on the days of Śivarātri, Aṣṭamirohinī etc. The fourth category consists of pompous festivals with processions, arrays of lamps and cultural performances.

Tāntrika works of Kerala have provided instruction for the above mentioned modes of rituals for the benefit of the temple priests and authorities. In most of the major temples of Kerala a routine can be noticed even now and it is based on the Tāntrika manuals. The following account will give a glimpse of these ritualistic routines. "The number of Pūjās per day as well as the time of their performances are also bound by rules. Generally there will be three Pūjās. Every day the Abhiṣeka (ceremonial bath) is performed to the idol very early in the morning, followed by Alaṅkāra (decoration). Then first Pūjā called Uṣaḥ Pūjā is conducted. At about noon we get the second Pūjā called Madhyāhna Pūjā or Uccapūjā. The temple is closed after this. It is re-opened in the evening and the third Pūjā is done in the early part of the night. This is called Ardha-yāma Pūjā after which the temple remains closed till the next morning. All these Pūjās have certain peculiarities in detail but the one that is most noteworthy is the offering of Balī to the Dikpālas and other connected Devatās after the Naivedya to the principal deity, followed by a procession of the Utsavamūrti (portable idol of the principal deity) along the Bāhyahāra to the accompaniment of drums and



other musical instruments. In some temples we get an additional Pūjā called Pantirāṭi between the Uṣaḥ Pūjā and Ucca pūjā and in certain temples yet another pūjā called Etirtta Pūjā between the Uṣaḥ Pūjā and Pantirāṭi. The rituals during the Utsavas are very elaborate and have their own special features. But the item called Śrībhūtabali deserves special mention. This takes quite a long time and has to be done with special care and in strict adherence to the rules laid down for each Devatā connected with it. Even the Tīlā, which is, by the bye, a long drum indigenous to Kerala, has to be beaten for each Devatā in a different manner and for a different duration.<sup>1</sup>

In this connection, it may be noted that there are three distinct Tāntrika systems prevalent in India. They are the Kashmīr system, the Bengal system and the Kerala system. The first two systems are predominantly non-Vedic and are called Vāmamārga. They follow the Śarva-Śākta cults. Use of liquor, meat as oblation to the deity, killing of animals and even human beings as part of the worship, ritualistic worship of a nude maiden etc., form the features of the system among others. Of the three Guṇas, the last one called Tamas predominates in this system. Naturally these systems have drawn their own followers and also detractors who consider these acts as obnoxious. On the other hand Dakṣiṇamārga prevalent in Kerala is Sāttvik in nature and abhors the offerings of liquor etc., in temples. It is Vaidika in outlook. Yantras and Homas are also used for worship. Bhagavatisēvā or the worship of Durgā in her Sāttvik aspect as Lalitā is commonly conducted in Kerala houses as a domestic ritual. This is facilitated by drawing a diagram on the floor with powder of rice, turmeric etc., and the worship is done on a bell-metal lamp placed in the centre of the ritualistic diagram. Another popular mode of

1. Religion, Art and Culture, p. 20.

sacrificial worship is the Gaṇapatihoma to please Gaṇapati in the order to remove impediments. This is conducted both in temples and in the houses of devotees. But it does not mean that the Vāmamārga was entirely unknown in Kerala. Legendary accounts maintain wonderful deeds performed by the followers of this system in Kerala when their sincerity was put to test by the authorities. A Nampūtiri Brahmin saved himself from great embarrassment by showing the fullmoon to a King of the locality on the night of a new moon day. It is said that the goddess worshipped by him came to his rescue by showing the illusion. In some minor temples liquor and meat were offered as oblations and later distributed them to the devotees. Even at present these acts survive though the orthodox people dismiss them as perversions. The system that is in vogue is undoubtedly Dakṣiṇamārga maintaining a high level of purity in conception as well as action. This is considered as the result of Kerala culture which gave due importance to human values.

The modes of rituals prescribed above can be noticed still in vogue in the major temples of Kerala, especially those located at Trivandrum, Śucindram, Varkala, Chengannur, Āranmula, Thriuvalla, Haripad, Mavelikkara, Kandivoor, Ambalappuzha, Payyannur, Talipparambu, Trippunithura, Trecembaram, Kumaranallur, Ettumanur and Vaikom. Some of these temples have certain special rituals also.

Most of the Tāntrika works of Kerala incidentally deal with the construction of the shrines. Even though there are manuals like the Śilparatna of Śrīkumāra which specifically concerns with the structural aspect of the shrines, works of Tāntrika nature also deal with this aspect. This is because the activities like temple construction received greater attention in this region. It is observed,<sup>1</sup> "The

1. K.P. Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, Vol. IV, p. 16, (Reprinted) Delhi, 1986.

Malabar style of temple architecture differs radically from that of other parts of India. Indeed it has little or no affinity with the Dravidian style obtaining on the East Coast. If at all, it has some resemblance to the Jaina temples of Canara, constructed on an entirely new style from those of Northern and Southern India and having some resemblance to the Nepalese style. Most of them are constructed entirely of wood and some of the stone temple that exist, are close imitations of the wooden ones. These shrines are often located in the best possible sites available, either on the top of a hill as in Śabarimala, on the verge of a lake as in Vaikom and Śāsthāmkottah or by the side of a running stream as in Āraṇmula. They are surrounded with groves and tanks for the refreshment and devotion of worshippers. There are elaborate rules regarding the construction of temples and these are prescribed by Tantra works.

"The typical indigenous temple of Kerala can be clearly identified by its characteristic structure which distinguishes it from the temples in other parts of India. The gigantic construction and imposing Gopuras which mark the temples in the other parts of South India are conspicuous by their absence in Kerala. The characteristic Kerala temple consists of the sancium sanctorum (Garbhagṛha) which is usually circular (Vṛtta) in shape but sometimes square (Caturśra) or rectangular (Caturāśradīrgha) with a conical or pyramidal roof (Śikhara) crowned by a crest (Śrīṅgā). Within this Garbhagṛha is the idol on a pedestal (Mūṛti). Round the Garbhagṛha is the first Prākāra called Antarmandala. Small Balipīthas representing the eight Dikpāthas, the seven Mātṛs etc., are placed here. A flight of steps called Śodhā connects this Prākāra with the door of the Garbhagṛha. In front of the Sopāna is the main Mandapa. Round this Mandapa and Antarmandala is the second



Prākāra called Antarhāra, forming a broad Verandah with doorways on all the four sides. The Antarhāra leads out into an enclosure containing the main Balipītha. After the Antarhāra we get the third Prākāra called Madhyahāra which is essentially a continuous structure having an array of lamps all round from top to bottom. Beyond this and just outside the main Balipītha is the flag staff (Dhvaja-stambha). The fourth Prākāra called Bāhyahāra is beyond this. It forms the pathway for the processions within the temple. The fifth and last Prākāra is the outermost wall of the temple. The is called Maryādā. The main entrance is through a simple Gopura which may be an ordinary doorway with a small roofing or one with a superstructure comprising rooms and Verandah. The space between the Garbhagrha and Antarhāra is roofless, so also is most of the space between the Madhyahāra and Maryādā. This results in every part of the temple being airy and well ventilated, a distinctive feature of the Kerala temple".<sup>1</sup>

Extending from the flag staff to the Gopura is a covered shed, known as Ānakkottil, for the elephants to take their stand in a line on the occasions of temple processions. Provision is also made in temples for the residence of priests who are enjoined to keep within the temple precincts while employed as such. The Tāntrika treatise have also dealt with the renovation of the temples that have seen their better days: purificatory rites for pollution of temples and idols etc. These rites vary according to the nature of the pollution. In short these works are replete with religious, philosophical and spiritual matters that influenced the life of people of Kerala for several centuries.

#### *Tāntrika Tradition of Kerala*

The existence of a large number of works relating to "Tantras, Āgamas" of Tantras shows the popularity and

importance of this branch of literature in Kerala. Among them we find a good number of works as produced by the scholars of Kerala. They composed these manuals using the vernacular as well as Sanskrit. Further, contributions on texts were made in the form of commentaries which often supplement the text. In fact, it was a need based activity since priests wanted guides for their use in domestic as well as temple rituals. Only a few of the vast material is published till now, a sizable portion remaining in the form of palm leaf manuscripts preserved mostly in private libraries.

Naturally there were two types of Tāntrika preceptors in Kerala. Some scholars restricted their activity to the practice of the ritual never caring to put down in writing their practical experiences. The other category of preceptors mainly concentrated their attention in compiling monographs for the benefit of the priestly class though some of them might have occasionally practised the precepts. The Kerala system of Tantra is predominantly Sāttvik in form of and belonged to the Dakṣiṇamārga following the Vedic tradition. The contents of the Tāntrika works produced in Kerala will substantiate this claim. But once in a while we hear of the other type showing its head. We have traditional stories where the exploits of the Vāmamārgins are narrated.

Traditions recorded in works like the *Keralotpatti* and the *Keralamāhātmya* that sage Paraśurāma conferred Tāntrika rites on Tarāṇanallūr family are not helpful to trace the historical development of the genre. These pseudo-historical works are of later origin and hence we have to look elsewhere for the early history of the Tāntrika system in Kerala.

Among the earliest sources for the history of the Tāntrika system in Kerala are the *Āgamaśāstra* and the *Āgamaśāstra*.

notice. Popularly known as Nārāyaṇa Bhrānta for his witty exchanges and actions he endeared himself to the common people of Kerala as the hero of many exploits. But he is not credited with the authorship of any work despite the popular tradition that he popularised Tantra in the region.

However his brother Melattol Agnihotri who is reputed to have performed ninety-nine Vedic sacrifices during his early life. He is believed to have performed the last sacrifice when he was just thirty-six years old. Some hold that he has translated a work called *Adhvarasampradāya* into Tamil. But these are just traditional stories. Another brother of Melattol Agnihotri is believed to have practiced Tantra following the *Vānamārga* offering meat and liquor to the deities quite against the normal practices in the region.

We have to admit that the beginnings of this literature is buried in obscurity and what we have before the advent of Śaṅkara is only some tradition which may contain some grains of truth.

#### *Prapañcasāra*

One of the most important works on Mantrasāstra is the *Prapañcasāra*<sup>1</sup> attributed to the authorship of Śaṅkarācārya the propounder of the Advaita system of philosophy and as such it happens to be an early work in the field having been produced in the 9th century A.D. The term *Prapañcasāra* means "the Essence of the Universe". It deals with various topics within the thirty-two chapters called *Paṭalas* and forms an encyclopaedia of a sort.

The work begins with an account of the creation. This is followed by treatises on chronology, embryology,

<sup>1</sup> Ed. by Taranātha Vidyaratna in *Tāntrika Darśana* (1971)



notice. Popularly known as Nārāgattu Bhrāntan for his witty exchanges and actions he endeared himself to the common people of Kerala as the hero of many exploits. But he is not credited with the authorship of any work despite the popular tradition that he popularised Tantra in the region.

However his brother Melattol Agnihotri who is reputed to have performed ninety-nine Vedic sacrifices during his early life. He is believed to have performed the last sacrifice when he was just thirty-six years old. Some hold that he has translated a work called *Adhvarasampradāya* into Tamil. But these are just traditional stories. Another brother of Melattol Agnihotri is believed to have practiced Tantra following the *Vānamārga*; offering meat and liquor to the deities quite against the normal practices in the region.

We have to admit that the beginnings of this literature is buried in obscurity and what we have before the advent of Śrī Śaṅkara is only some tradition which may contain some grains of truth.

#### *Prapañcasāra*

One of the most important works on *Mantraśāstra* is the *Prapañcasāra*<sup>1</sup> attributed to the authorship of Śaṅkarācārya, the propounder of the Advaita system of philosophy and as such it happens to be an early work in the field having been produced in the 9th century A.D. The term *Prapañcasāra* means "the Essence of the Universe". It deals with various topics within the thirty-two chapters called *Pañcā* and forms an encyclopaedia of a sort.

The work begins with an account of the creation, this is followed by treatises on chronology, embryology,

<sup>1</sup> Ed. by Tavanatha Vidyanatha in *Flitrika Texts Vol. 11* 1714.

anatomy, physiology and psychology which are more scientific than the succeeding chapters on the occult doctrines of Kuṇḍalinī and the secret significance of the Sanskrit alphabet and the Bījas. The chapters on the ritual for the consecration (Dīkṣā), the worship of the mothers and the meditations on the Devī are of considerable significance from the point of view of the history of religion. The ritual and the Mantras described in this Tantra are not limited to the worship of the various forms of Devī and Śiva, but frequently also Viṣṇu and his avatāras are referred to<sup>1</sup>. The predominance of the erotic element in the Devī-worship is a notable feature and the efficacy of Mantras compelling people to act is propagated. The union of man and woman is presented as a mystical union of the ego (ahamkāra) with knowledge (Buddhi) and as a holy act of sacrifice. Some of the descriptions are replete with sensual fire. The work is popular not only in Kerala but also in the different parts of the country and it has been commented upon by many scholars. Subjects like the origin of sound, its power, purpose etc., are described minutely since in Mantrāsāstra, Akṣaras or alphabets have supreme importance. The concept of Śabdabrahma is explained in the beginning of the text itself as follows :

मूलाधारात् प्रथममौदतो यस्तु भावः पराख्य  
 पञ्चात पश्यन्त्यथ हृदयगे बुद्धिमुद् मध्यमाख्या ।  
 वक्त्रे वृक्षयथ रुद्रदुषोरस्य जग्तोस्तुमुमुन्ता  
 ब्रह्मस्तस्मात् भवति पञ्चपरितो वर्णसङ्घः ॥

The origin of the audible sound from Mūlādhāra through the four stages is described in the verse. The author maintains that those who properly worship Gods, sages, manes, guests and sacrificial fire everyday would attain their

<sup>1</sup> M. Winternitz, A History of Indian Literature, Vol. I, Delhi, 1972 pp. 602-603.